



*Establishing, protecting and maintaining foot trails in America*

January 31, 2002

Southern Forest Resource Assessment  
C/o John Greis  
USDA Forest Service  
1720 Peachtree Road, NW  
Atlanta, GA 30309

Dear Mr. Greis:

I am writing on behalf of American Hiking Society (AHS) to comment on the Southern Forest Resource Assessment (SFRA). We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on this important document, especially as AHS develops a new regionally focused program in the region--the Southern Appalachians Initiative (SAI)--to network and build a conservation constituency among trail volunteers, conservation organizations, and agencies.

In general, the draft summary report highlights the primary conservation issues and challenges facing the region; however, recreation receives limited attention despite its growing significance. We urge you to include a broader evaluation of recreation in the final SFRA.

Section 3.1.4 discusses the increasing recreation pressures on public lands, and states that "there appears to be limited capacity to expand forest-based recreation in the South." AHS is keenly aware of the congestion and demand in high-use areas such as the Smoky Mountains and along the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. As a result of an AHS-initiated Trail Conservation Retreat in November 2000 among trail organizations and public agency representatives, it became evident that there is an urgent need to protect wild places and create new recreation opportunities in the populous Southeast. In contrast to the draft assessment, AHS firmly believes that opportunities exist to disperse recreation in a more balanced manner and relieve congestion through key trail linkages and connections between both public and private lands.

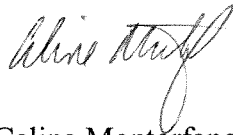
While section 3.1.4 notes the likelihood of increasing "competition" among various user groups, it does not address the issue of user conflicts or the need to balance different forms of recreation (i.e. human powered, motorized, etc). We suggest including a general discussion of current and projected recreation management plans and tools to address issues such as competition, user conflicts, and recreation impacts.

Section 3.1.4. briefly mentions some of the impacts of recreation congestion on forest ecosystems. This discussion is very limited and fails to acknowledge the ecological and environmental effects of different types of recreation, particularly motorized recreational use. Moreover, the impacts of recreation include impacts on other recreationists in addition to impacts on forest resources. The proliferation of motorized recreation, including problems with illegal use and trespass, require further analyses of the spectrum of impacts.

Under Section 4.4, Knowledge Gaps and Scientific Uncertainties, we recommend adding a bullet on recreation. Specifically, we stress the need to inventory southern forest trails by length and type of use, given the lack of current data. In addition, we suggest evaluating local, public support for trails, both by use of trails and by the volunteers that build and maintain trails.

American Hiking Society is the only national recreation-based conservation organization dedicated to establishing, protecting, and maintaining foot trails in America. With over 10,000 individual members and 160 member trail clubs, American Hiking represents more than half a million outdoorspeople and serves as the voice of the American hiker. Thank you for accepting our input at this time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Celina Montorfano".

Celina Montorfano  
Alliance Policy Manager